

## MEDIA RELEASE | 24<sup>TH</sup> MARCH 2021

# *In-depth look at youth mental health raises concerns and offers hope*



Tomorrow McCreary Centre Society will release *Doing OK? Checking in on the mental health of BC youth*. The report is based on data from the 2018 BC Adolescent Health Survey.

McCreary's Executive Director, Annie Smith, explains "A couple of weeks ago we released a report about vaping during the COVID-19 pandemic and it showed the link between stress, anxiety and vaping. Today's report takes a deeper look at youth mental health and how we can support young people when they are struggling in this area, which will be particularly important as things start to open up again."

Smith went on to say "Although this data was collected pre-pandemic, the results still give us some timely information about adolescent mental health, including which youth seem to be most likely to self-harm and feel suicidal, as well as the reasons they sometimes don't get the treatment and support they need."

The report also highlights where services might not be meeting the needs of young people, particularly those with additional challenges and barriers. For example, youth who were struggling with substance use addiction along with other mental health challenges were more likely to report that having a previous negative experience with services was the reason they had not sought out mental health care when they needed it.

A copy of the report *Doing OK? Checking in on the mental health of BC youth* will be available at [www.mcs.bc.ca](http://www.mcs.bc.ca).

## WEBINAR PRESENTATIONS

Webinar presentations of the results are scheduled for:

- March 25<sup>th</sup> at 1pm
- March 31<sup>st</sup> at 1pm
- April 1<sup>st</sup> at 11am
- April 13<sup>th</sup> at 11am and 3pm

Webinar details:

- Join from your computer, tablet, or smartphone:  
<https://global.gotomeeting.com/join/283669373>
- Join via phone: 1-888-455-1389 (Toll free). Access code: 283-669-373



McCreary Centre Society is a non-government, non-profit organization committed to improving the health of BC youth through research, evaluation and community-based projects.

Founded in 1977, our vision is that all youth are supported to be healthy and connected.

### Contact

Annie Smith  
Executive Director

3552 Hastings Street East  
Vancouver, BC V5K 2A7

**Tel:** 604-291-1996 ext 225  
**Cell:** 604-728-9494

**Email:** [annie@mcs.bc.ca](mailto:annie@mcs.bc.ca)

**[www.mcs.bc.ca](http://www.mcs.bc.ca)**

## **BACKGROUND**

This report uses data from the BC Adolescent Health Survey (BC AHS). The BC AHS is a comprehensive youth health survey completed every five years since 1992 by students aged 12–19 in school districts across BC. In 2018, over 38,000 Grade 7–12 students in 58 of BC's 60 school districts completed the survey. For more details about the survey, visit [www.mcs.bc.ca](http://www.mcs.bc.ca). The report was funded by the BC government.

### **Some key findings from the report:**

Most BC students (73%) rated their mental health as good or excellent. However, youth in 2018 were less likely to rate their mental health positively than those in 2013. There were also gender differences, with 82% of males rating their mental health as good or excellent, compared to 65% of females, and 40% of non-binary youth.

Overall, there was an increase in the percentage of students who had self-harmed in the past year (from 15% in 2013 to 17% in 2018), with those aged 13 to 15 the most likely to have done so.

Despite an increase in students who had seriously considered suicide in the past year, the percentage who had attempted suicide decreased over the past fifteen years (from 7% in 2003 to 5%). Older youth were generally more likely than younger ones to have seriously considered suicide. However, those aged 14–15 were more likely to have attempted suicide than those aged 17–18 (6% vs. 4%).

Living in poverty was one of the predictors of poorer mental health. For example, 35% of youth who often or always went to bed hungry because there was not enough money for food at home had experienced extreme despair in the past month, compared to 6% who never went to bed hungry.

Experiencing violence and victimization was also associated with poorer mental health. For example, youth who had been physically and/or sexually abused; experienced dating violence; or had been bullied in person or online were more likely than youth who had not had these experiences to have self-harmed, seriously considered suicide, and attempted suicide in the past year.

In 2018, 18% of students had missed out on mental health services they felt they needed in the past year, which was an increase from 11% in 2013. Youth who had a co-occurring substance use challenge with a mental health condition (such as depression or anxiety) were more likely to have missed out on accessing needed mental health services, compared to those who had a mental condition but did not have substance use challenges (60% vs. 47%).

Youth (including those with conditions such as depression, anxiety and PTSD) reported more positive mental health when they had a healthy lifestyle, including sleeping eight or more hours, exercising regularly, and eating healthily. They were also more likely to report positive mental health when they felt safe, connected and supported. For example, 81% of those who felt connected to their community felt hopeful for their future, compared to 44% who did not feel connected.

Abstaining from substances such as alcohol and cannabis was associated with more positive mental health, as was using in moderation, if youth did use substances.

Youth who felt they spent the right amount of time with their family, friends, alone, and in nature reported more positive mental health than those who felt they had too much time or too little time.